

Transcript of Westat Education CECR Webinar 4

Anticipating the Data Quality Challenges in TIF: Delivering Student-Teacher Linkages and Managing and Presenting Complex Data April 15, 2010

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Peter Witham, Technical Assistance, Value-Added Research Center

Presentation

Operator

Good afternoon and welcome to the Westat CECR Webinar 4. I would now like to
turn the conference over to Chris Thorn. Please go ahead, sir.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Thank you. Welcome to the webinar. Our title is Anticipating the Data Quality
Challenges in the Teacher Incentive Fund: Delivering Student-Teacher Linkages and
Managing and Presenting Complex Data. Complex to say. I am Chris Thorn. I'm
with the Value-Added Research Center at the University of Wisconsin. My colleague,
Peter Witham, is also with University of Wisconsin. I will be the moderator for our
discussion today.

This is the last webinar in our series on Performance Based Compensation Systems
produced by the US Department of Education and the Center for Educator
Compensation Reform. I encourage you to visit our website at cecr.ed.gov to view a
replay of the other webinars in our series.

The PowerPoint presented today is available for downloading through a link below the
presentation window at the bottom of your screen. Our session will last about an hour

and is being recorded. If there is a slide-specific question, we will ask you to ask them at the end of that slide presentation. Otherwise, there'll be a Q&A session after the presentation. We will have the opportunity to ask questions to all the presenters in this webinar. You may submit your question at anytime during the talk by clicking the question button in the upper right corner of your screen.

Let's see who is in the conference with us today. Please select the choice that best describes your affiliation in the list that you see on your screen now and then push the vote button.

Alright. Are we publishing this to their screens as well?

Well, we have... I'm not sure if this is being published to your screens as well, but we have 16 district level participants, 2 state, 6 nonprofits, 3 charter schools, and 10 who identified themselves as other.

On this presentation, we're joined by Carla Stevens and Don Hilber of the Houston Independent School District in Texas, Carol Ruckel of Weld School District in Colorado, and Steven Glazerman and Allison McKie from Mathematica Policy Research. It's time to get started. I'd like for... to introduce Carla and Don.

Carla Stevens – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Assistant Superintendent

Great. Thank you so much, Chris. We appreciate being invited to talk on this. In Houston, what we would like to talk about a little bit is some of the data quality challenges that we have had in TIF. To give you just kind of a brief overview, next slide, of what it is that we are going to be talking about is we're going to be talking about the distinguishing features of the Houston ASPIRE Award which is our performance pay system. Some of the data quality components that we are going to be dealing with are the program metrics, employee identification, and our payment processes and then some of the next step for Houston.

Next slide.

Some of the key features of Houston's program, first of all, we have just completed our fourth payout. We actually started this program using the 2005-2006 data analysis and we paid that out in January of 2007. It actually takes as that long to do the calculation because some of the data that we used is not available from the state and from some of our other analysis until usually about November and so then with the calculations that we do, we do our payout then at the end of January.

It is a comprehensive program. Every campus, all instructional staff that are included; NHISD are included in this program. We have not piloted and we did not do a small subset.

It is large scale. We have nearly 23,000 potentially eligible employees; that is all campus-based staff. That includes core teachers, noncore teachers, administrators, all the way to including clerks, secretarial staff, and maintenance workers. Everyone

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is included in the program. They're not all funded under TIF, obviously, but we have... as you can see, we paid out \$40 million and we have a very small portion of that as actually paid for through our TIF funding. We also have additional funding that we get from our state and then our district provides a lot of money into this performance pay program. Like I said, we paid out \$40 million... over \$40 million just last year and approximately 88% of the employees who were eligible in the program received some form of pay.

The program is student assessment driven. It is basically looking strictly at student data. It's looking mostly at student growth on value added, but we also have a little bit of an achievement component. It is very tied to student data and that's something that was adamant by our Board that it be data driven and student data focused.

We do use value-added data for two of our three strands. There is a campus component that all employees are eligible for and then there is a strand, too, that is specifically for our core teachers and in grades Pre K through 12 and they are eligible for the most amount of money. An individual teacher can make up to \$10,300. That strand, too, that is the core teacher strand \$7000 of the dollars comes from that one strand. The other strands are less money amounts in that from campus level data.

We rely very heavily on our external partners to help us with data analysis and that partly because of, I'm sure some of you may know, that in... when we rolled this out in year one for our first payout, we did it mostly internally in the district. Our analysis was internal. Our communications rolls in internally and there really wasn't a lot of professional development around this and we found that we really had some areas that we needed to fix and so with the help of external partners, we now contract out the value-added data analysis. We also have professional development support and we have a lot of communication support. We have an online portal and I think Don is going to talk a little bit more about that. And a lot of that has been funded through foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates and the Broad Foundation.

One of the key things that we found out when we rolled this out in year one and things didn't go nearly as smoothly as we had hoped was that people did not see how this performance pay really connected to anything else we were doing in the district. And so then for year two, we made sure that it was very clear that the performance pay was just part of our larger school improvement effort that we call ASPIRE and that that includes all of the things that we're doing as far as professional development, improving practice in the classrooms, informing our practices using data, and then recognizing that X1's (ph) which is through our performance pay program. And then the district itself, as I said, has committed multiyear funding to make sure that this program continues to be successful and that it is sustainable across time.

Next slide.

What I want to talk about on some of our quality issues, one of the key components of our program and as looking at the program metrics specifically value-added data based off on our student achievements. The district up until we did this performance pay program had always looked at student achievements, how many kids passed the

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test. We're very heavy in the passing rates. The state accountability system focused on passing rate.

A key component of this program is looking at growth. Actually looking at student growth, value-added analysis, and making sure that those measures are accurate. That was a big change for the district and being able to calculate that data and also being able to explain that data. What we have done, we used both criterion-referenced test and norm-referenced test. We give that information to in external contractor versus doing it in-house which is what we did the first year and we're very confident that the information that we get back from the external vendor is valid and reliable and we can defend that better than it being an internal analysis that the research department is doing.

One of the things that we have now are these student growth indicators using the value-added data for the last three years. And we use it in our performance pay but now we also use it for all of our school improvement efforts. It helps us provide a lot of information back to our campus as to the efficacy of our teachers, our programs, our schools, and it's been very helpful. What we need to continue to do is improve our communications and our training so that people really do know and understand how to use the value-added data.

Next slide. Oh.

Don Hilber – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Manager
Wrong way.

Carla Stevens – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Assistant Superintendent
Wrong direction. One more.

Don Hilber – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Manager
Okay. I'm going to talk about two other components of our data quality that Carla didn't touch on. One of them is employee identification that in a nutshell is making sure that the right employee gets the right award. This actually happens before we deal with that program metrics in a sequential annual basis. Obviously, a lot of upfront work. What we discovered over the years is that if we get things right earlier in the year, we will have less problems later in the year. So employee identification is a big component of this. We rely heavily on our student information system and on our HR record system to provide us that underlying data, however, we don't always find that that underlying data as given to us, because it is developed for other purposes, necessarily suits our needs. So we do need to put a lot of staff effort into checking and verifying that information. We also need to make sure we can supplement it or we find it as we need to for this particular purpose.

We found that putting systems in place upfront also in terms of what sort of eligibility rules have to be there in order for someone to qualify for the award program or to be

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placed in a particular category are very important and in order to get this all to work together, we need to basically have an information be transparent, be shared back with our schools so they can tell us where we need to make adjustments, corrections, and the like. We have established the characterization framework that places our teachers, staff, and administrators in to very defined level we based on awards a lot on most levels that needs to be verified and check ideally before the school year ends and have that something that we get into very late in the school year.

We also have developed our student-teacher linkage system in concert with one of our partners. That's very critical because the information coming out of all our students' information system isn't necessarily active as I have mentioned earlier. We provide the information out to our school via a portal. We have principals set it up. We have our teachers actually perform the linkages themselves. Our principals come back and confirm that, both of their campuses are intact and then we come back in the fall again and we confirm some of that information to make sure everyone is still eligible for the award.

Naturally, we need to keep enhancing this upfront system. We make adjustments to it now every year. And we also obviously need to train campus staff both our administrators and staff or our teachers and the like in terms of how to best utilize this so we do get good information.

Next slide.

The last component of data quality is at the back end; that's actually linking the payment. Here, our concern is in the past has been that we not only want to assure that the payments are made timely, you have a large volume of payments to occur the following January after the school year ends, but we also want to make sure that payout is transparent. That people know what kind of awards they're getting and that they have a chance to come back and challenge our award before we actually dispense the check or make the direct deposit. To do that, we've also utilized our partners to create a number of systems. We have award notices that are actually individualized. We provided those award notices to every employee on our portal. We get that preliminary notice and again a final notice if there has been a change. We established a month-long inquiry period near the very end of the award where questions can come forward and challenges. Also our inquiries have gone down every year which is a testament to some of these earlier things that I mentioned.

We mentioned the portal delivery of both these notices and these entries. That is a critical element especially when you're dealing the high volume like we do. And we also need to do a lot of interdepartmental planning on this. We're not the only department involved. We have our human resources area, our accounting area, our payroll area, et cetera, et cetera. All need to be kind of be on one page and be doing things coordinated and very quickly.

We still have some future things we need to do for downloading (ph) in terms of incorporating some of our charter schools who are not part of our payment system. We're trying to get them incorporated much better than we have in the past.

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And that sort of lead to the next slide, most of which we've mentioned already. These are sort of the next steps for us in terms of data quality, some of which were mentioned by Carla already and by myself. We've obviously got to keep communicating to employees on all of these processes whether it's the payment process, the employee identification, or the actual guts of the metrics of the award. We obviously have to keep training especially when it comes to value added because it has a prominence in our district. We need to keep building that capacity to deliver the systems and especially to do more in-house as our grant funding goes away. And then we also need to, like I mentioned earlier, keep those data systems intact, both the ones that we rely upon and the ones we especially built for this purpose.

Thank you.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Alright. Thank you very much. I think we're ready to introduce our next presenter.

Carol Ruckel – Weld Re-8 School District, Colorado – Teacher Incentive Fund Coordinator

Hi. This is Carol Ruckel from Weld Re-8 in Fort Lupton, Colorado. We were selected in the first round of TIF grants so we're in our fourth year right now. We're one of four TIF projects in Colorado and all four of us are... we're all very different from each other both in terms of what we're doing and in terms of our setting.

Next slide.

We're quite a bit different from Houston, almost the opposite. We're semi-rural. We're located about 35 miles northeast of Denver and we're just outside the urban sprawl. We're partially a bedroom community. We also serve as the agricultural and oil and gas industries in the area with some small manufacturing in town as well. Our district serves four communities, three of which are very, very small. The City of Fort Lupton is at the center with a population of 7500 and in all TIF districts, we're high need. We're a little different from some in that all of our schools are high-need schools. You'll see some figures thereabout our district. The 63% free and reduced lunch rate, we're seeing go up almost monthly as the economy has hit us really pretty hard here.

The last bullet on the slide is the most significant one and you'll see later we have about that... we have four schools in town in Fort Lupton, two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school and we have a magnet program that's in one of other communities about 10 miles west of us which pull students from our two elementaries and our middle school. That's a K-8 program right now. We have fewer than 200 eligible employees for our TIF program. We include teachers, principals, and our instructional pair of professionals in our project.

Next slide.

Our plan calls for a large student committee with teachers, administrators, community members, parents, and a board representative. We added four small taskforces for

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specific elements of our plan. It was very difficult to recruit members the first year. We started really in the middle of the year because there hadn't been a payout, there hadn't been a lot of publicity, and TIF really didn't seem real in the district. It's important to note here that our teachers and union were not involved in developing our grant proposal. So they have little preparation for the implementation of performance pay in the district. Teacher and principal participation is required in the new round of applications and we're very glad to see that that change has taken place.

I joined the district after the grant was awarded. I came on board in January 2007 as a project coordinator.

Our proposal also calls for an award the first year which was really just a half year. So we had very little planning time. We wanted to start with school wide bonuses to encourage the culture we've been building of teacher co-teams (ph) and cooperation. Our student achievement measures taskforce, which we call SAM, is the bulk of this work and they in the steering committee decided that we would use an existing school accreditation model in Colorado where districts are responsible for accrediting their individual schools and they decided to use that model to avoid the gotcha situation where teachers didn't know in advance what they were going to be rewarded for since the rewards were going to be based on student achievement improvement in that first half year which was one of our projects.

The accreditation model was pretty complex with schools receiving a rating score that was calculated by a central office and based largely on attainment gains by this aggregated groups on our state test called CSAP with an additional factor that they added to recognize schools that got a higher score... accreditation score than they had earned the previous year. When our results were calculated in the fall and we don't get our state test result until August and September, we learned first that our teachers didn't understand the model merely as well as we had assumed even though it had been used for several years and the unexpected happened in terms of results, the perception that the worst school got the most money and the best school came in third. The model I would note does not measure cohort improvement.

Next slide please.

So we had a high level of dissatisfaction, to it put mildly. Not unlike Houston with their first year rate, we had some issues and so we went back to work. The SAM taskforce suddenly quadrupled with large contingents from the two schools that felt the most wronged by the first year. We had over 20 people on that taskforce which in our district is 10% of our teaching force. We called in an outside facilitator to help us work through issues and to reinforce the consensus process that we use in our district for decision making including in negotiations. The group met almost weekly studying a variety of assessment possibilities to replace the accreditation model. They studied value add and we consulted with Chris Thorn, who is our moderator today, who's one of many experts available to TIF grantees through CECR. We also got help from communications experts that the TIF National Project makes available to us and they're help was just invaluable in sorting things out. And we decided we needed to look for a value add where growth measure is the best way of really recognizing the

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work that teachers were doing especially in the districts where many of our students are low performing.

Next slide.

So the state actually came to our rescue without knowing it because they introduced a new system of reporting state test scores that includes student growth and they built in student growth percentile. It's not a pure value add but it was the best tool available to us. As a small pretty poor district, we don't have the resources to do a lot of data manipulation or assessment... build assessments ourselves. The model generates growth percentiles for students on each of three of the state tests, reading, writing, and math and it also calculates school level growth percentile on those tests. So it creates groups of academic peer, students who have the same score history going back up to three years and then compares students within that peer group and determines how much growth each student has made in relation to that peer group.

Next slide please.

So the state provides school level data but for four schools. We only have four official schools in the district. So remember that fifth site we have, we have to disaggregate its data, and since it is a magnet program that was originally set up for our high performing students, pulling those scores out of our other three schools can negatively affect their scores. We have found it hasn't been a large effect but it in effect reduced the growth scores for those three schools. But SAM, our students' achievement measures, taskforce was very clear from the beginning of our project that we needed to have five schools for TIF that we needed to treat Quest Academy as a separate school so that teachers got credit only for the students that they taught. What we do now is have Chris' staff at the Value-Added Research Center independently calculate our result after we've pulled out the Quest scores to make sure that we are accurate. And sometimes that's come back and forth to make sure our numbers are exact but we keep working on it as until we get there. Since our original student growth data comes from the state and then is verified, our teachers accept the data as correct and in the last two years, we have had not a single challenge to our calculations.

Next slide please.

So we stayed with the school wide model... school wide bonuses avoiding the issue that you may have read about where 69% generally of teachers do not get state test results. We've done tons of information sharing. We have State Department of Education come to our district and explain the growth model to teachers before we took it to negotiations as the tool to use for our TIF bonuses so that they had sort of neutral... more neutral information about how the growth model worked. Then we got approval through negotiations to use it for our second year payout, but we only have one week of school left that year. So we really did blitz, visiting every school to explain how it's going to work. We repeated that information in the fall, holding sessions in all of our schools again in August and September as our test results were released. We have a section on our district website for TIF and we also provided print materials for all of our staff.

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Next slide please.

We were fortunate that in year two, every site received a bonus. They ranged inside from \$560 to \$2170 but the fact that everybody got something smooth the way for acceptance and understanding of the growth model. SAM quickly decided to keep the same model for year three. This time and as with the past that we made this test in October, the results were quite different for year three. Two sites received no bonus at all. The range from the other three sites was \$500 to \$2210. Our surveys that we conducted afterwards and we survey our staff every year showed a little less support for the plan understandably, but we had no controversy. It was almost as non-event. SAM decided to maintain the model for year four based on the need for consistency over time and what they feel is really simplicity and clarity of the data. We did another round of workshops on the growth model in all of our schools in January and February to reinforce teachers' understanding and to continue to encourage them to use the data to drive instruction. That's our next piece is to really keep pushing on the use of data in the district to drive instruction.

Next slide.

Because we're so small with about 180 teachers and yes, we have systems that link teachers to students and all of that but we can actually do our calculations by hand and where we have teachers who work in more than one building for example, I calculate their payouts individually. They were small enough that we can do that and we've been able because we were small to involve a very high percentage of our faculty in our project. SAM worked on real assessment issues and knew that they were working with real meaty stuff and that made us feel really significant to them.

Since we have taskforces and the steering committee in place in that first year, it was easier for us to roll with the punches when our first plan went awry and to do the work we needed to do to find a new measurement plan. We continued to survey our staff every year and we have a very strong outside evaluator who helps us see and analyze issues as they come up. For us it's been about building relationships and trust on a very personal level so that we can all work together successfully.

Thank you.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Thank you very much, Carol, who I mistakenly didn't introduce before she began to speak.

Now, we are going to move on to our colleagues from Mathematica and I think Allison is going to take the lead here if I have my notes right.

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Allison McKie – Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. – Economist

I will. Thank you. Good afternoon.

So we'll briefly describe the program in the Chicago TIF project and then discuss the structure and design of the evaluation highlighting what goes on along the way.

So next slide please.

What is the Teacher Advancement Program or TAP? TAP is a widely replicated whole school reform model that aims to improve schools by raising teacher quality. Under the TAP model, teachers can earn performance awards based on a combination of their value-added student (ph) achievements and their observed performance in the classrooms. The value-added piece typically includes both classroom levels and school level measures of value added.

Another key component of the model is the career ladder. Teachers can earn extra pay for taking on extra responsibilities through promotions from career teacher to a mentor teacher or a master teacher. The model also includes ongoing school-based professional development during the school day. So teachers meet between small collector groups led by mentor and master teachers. The program provides opportunities to analyze unit data with the aim of improving instruction and to run research based instructional strategies for increasing academic achievements. So while all TAP schools are supposed to have these basic model elements, other program specifics can vary across the schools.

Next slide.

So funded primarily with their TIF grant to the Chicago Public Schools, which I'll refer to as CPS, began implementing its version of TAP in 2007 with 10 schools and they've added 10 new TAP schools each year of the TIF grant's four-year implementation period. In Chicago TAP, master teachers are called lead teachers and they receive a \$15,000 salary augmentation for their extra responsibilities. Mentor teachers receive \$7000. Chicago TAP also includes performance awards not only for the teachers but also for principals as well as other school staff.

Next one.

So moving on to the evaluation itself, I think one of the keys to success has been the way CPS has structured the project. So the Chicago TIF project is carefully designed to have one set of external partners and funders working with CPS on implementation of Chicago TAP and another set of external partners working with CPS on the evaluation of the program. So these two functions are complimentary but they are the distinct.

On the implementation side, Chicago TAP is funded primarily by the US Department of Education, shown here as ED, the REAL/TAP (ph) grant along with other funding partners. The effort also involves the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching or NIET which is officially the National TAP office based in Santa Monica, California. Then there is the Value-Added Research Center or VARC which is based at the

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University of Wisconsin. As have been mentioned with other grantees, VARC provides support to the district in developing value-added measures of teacher performance, measures what to drive TAP as well as other related policies in the district.

Within CPS, there is also a Chicago tax program manager supported by staff and the district Human Resources are now Human capital staff, all of which are directed towards supporting implementation in TAP schools.

Now on the evaluation side, CPS has us as an external partner, Mathematica Policy Research, shown here in red. The research evaluation staff within CPS also conducts their own internal evaluation. Now their evaluation is focused more on the implementation question. Our, Mathematica's, external evaluation focuses mostly on outcomes and impacts. Our study design, as we'll see in a minute, relies heavily on not only the TAP schools which are shown on the implementation side but also on non-TAP comparison school in CPS shown on the evaluation side. The main thing, the independents of the evaluation, we, at Mathematica, got funding from the Joyce Foundation. Now critical to maintaining independence yet also having a positive cooperative relationship with the CPS has been having an evaluation grantee liaison.

Next one slide please.

So what we have found is CPS researcher, has served in that liaison capacity for this project. In conducting our impact evaluation, we draw upon administrative data collected by CPS, implementation fidelity data collected by NIET as well as program information provided by the Chicago TAP staff. So as the liaison will provide a single point of contact which have been extremely helpful. So rather than us trying to figure out who to go to in the district with data questions or which Chicago TAP staff person to ask about how the program operates, we go to Laura with our questions and she very diligently follows up with or connect us to the appropriate people to get the answers we need. And the liaison office helps all of us involved to coordinate the data collection so that we can minimize the burden on CPS teachers and principals. Having a liaison, also maintains (inaudible) buffer allowing us to engage with Chicago TAP staff as appropriate without becoming too intimately involved with the program itself. So that's the structure of the evaluation.

Now I'll turn it over to Steve to talk about the evaluation design.

Next one.

Steven Glazerman – Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. – Economist

Thanks, Allison.

So I just to mention briefly in overview fashion our strategy for estimating the impacts of the program on the outcomes, student and the teacher outcomes, and to some degree this could be helpful to other grantees but we've actually been selected to service the national evaluator for the next round of TIF grants and there is sort of a two-part competition. One part of that is the evaluation competition and so we would encourage grant applicants, prospective grantees, to consider that and make use of

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the usual the background for the type of study design that might be implemented but wouldn't necessarily be the responsibility of the district. So I'm going to actually skip this wordy slide and just go straight to some pictures that might be more acceptable.

Could we just skip to the next slide, please? Okay, thanks.

So putting it in pictures, the first thing we did was in talking with Chicago Public Schools was recognize that they was a roll out of the program 10 schools per year. And so this picture shows you what it looks like considering the first 20 schools that we asked them to recruit all at once so that we can randomly assign them to either implement in 2007, fall '07, or to delay implementation and be part of that second cohort they implemented in 2008. As you can see, this gives us the opportunity to have two sets of schools that are systematically... have no systematic differences between them except for the timing and basically their lottery number which determines the timing of when they began employing their program. So you see that first years after the recruitment and lottery, the group... the box in red is a control group which you know is otherwise ready to be a TAP school except that they're not implementing the program and then we did this...

Again, could I ask you to go to the next slide?

You see this, we've done this again for cohorts 3 and 4 for the last 20 schools and the design would be repeated. Now, to sort of strengthen this study design which is sometimes called randomized roll out, we recognized that after that first year based on this design, the control group is already getting services, and so it becomes more challenging to try and interpret the differences between these two cohorts as we go further along. So if you get to the next slide, you'll see sort of the other piece which in addition to the experimental design. We have a quasi experimental mass comparison or propensity score mass comparison design where we have sets of schools corresponding to each of the central cohorts, cohorts 1 and 2, and then another one corresponding to cohorts 3 and 4, where these schools in the beige boxes represent a no treatment comparison group that we follow for the duration of the study. And so this has been a very useful design but what I'm going to do is, if you can go to the next slide, just talk about some of the challenges encountered at overcoming those challenges. Okay.

So the first of the challenges... I'm going to talk about two sets of challenges. The first one is related to the implementation of the random assignment design. And one of the things that was sort of interesting, just as we were going to do that first lottery in spring of 2007 as that the district sort of expressed a strong interest in favoring certain schools over others to go first and felt that they were more ready and that there were some schools that weren't ready. And obviously, this type of thinking will branch into the original random (ph) assignment design but as a way to accommodate this preference but still keep the design intact, we decided to, in conjunction with the district, assign all the schools some probability of being... getting into the first cohort, some probability being in the second, but those probabilities would be higher for more ready schools and lower for the less ready schools in such a way that it would be systematically sort of use weights to undo if unequal probability was tying us to

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treatment (ph) to estimate the true impacts. And so this strategy turned out to be sort of a successful dodge to what could have been a problem to the design.

Another kind of thing that comes up... whatever you're trying... now these are not large cohorts of schools. I mentioned 10 schools per year is actually eight schools of the same type which is the K-8 elementary schools that have students in regularly tested grades and subjects. They are not charter schools. These are small groups that we're assigning and so in order to achieve balance, normally we need random assignments to have end or to infinity a large number of... a large sample. And so in order to generate a more precise estimate in light of these small sizes, we do think that analogous to stratification as described in our designer report which is in our website but it is to take into account all these integral characteristics of schools like size, race, ethnicity, and so on. And that's really critical for maximizing the statistical precision which... that we can achieve with this kind of study design.

And the third was, as I mentioned, the schools are not homogeneous. You have... within each group of 10 schools, the district decides to have eight CPS elementary schools which are elementary K-8 and one high school and one charter school. So charter schools and high schools do not have this comparable data. High schools, they don't test in the same subjects or the same grade as frequently as we need it and then in the charter schools, they do not have the teacher mobility data that we needed to measure retention and outcomes. And so our approach was to sort of acknowledge that and just sort of use a separate methodology, more of looking individually at schools or the case study approach for these schools.

Okay. So let's go to the next slide.

And again in keeping with the theme of this webinar which we were asked to address which is anticipating data quality challenges and we have a few data challenges that were part of this project. The first one is the fact that student records data which normally to do teacher level value-added analysis would require a good linkage between the students and the teachers, which teachers were responsible for which student outcomes. Our understanding was that this was not... that these teachers through links were not as reliable district wide at least with all TIFF TAP schools initially in the district and has been working on improving this to the point that they can use them for decisions like performance-based compensations. Now, this turned out to be a major challenge with the implementation. If you remember Allison's chart, the implementation side is where VARC has to worry about this. We could always have Chris take this part of the talk because, you know, VARC has been dealing with the challenges how to develop, how you add the indicators to be used as part of the program, the implication, given the limitations in the data, and these have been improving over time as you have. This is important for interpreting the impacts but it's not necessarily an evaluation problem because we're looking at schools, at the average TAP effect so we just care about the TAP schools. That would be just school by grade analysis but you just be cautious in designing a study, taking this into account and not to the extent that, you know, we had some analysis that would have required teacher-level value-added performance measures.

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Other data challenges that would arise in a situation like this. We're relying heavily on administrative data, particularly administrative data on teachers to measure teacher mobility and the key to success here is really having a good liaison, as Allison mentioned, having somebody in the district who can relay all the complexities of running a school district and how those translate into data quirks. So for instance, the TAP model has something called lead teacher. Well, Chicago is a big district and they do a lot of interesting innovations all going on at once. There's many other kind of teachers who happened to be called lead teachers, too, encoded especially in the data. And you have like 10 other teachers, teachers who have moved during the year. And so there is really no substitute for getting down into the details of how a school operates in order to understand administrative data and nobody can do that better than HR or Human Capital staff and the research evaluation staff all working together with, in case, the external evaluator to understand the data.

And then we did... this is our own teacher surveys in 2008 and in this year and also principal interviews and there I think this is just part of all good research practice, when you're doing primary data collection particularly in a district where there's a lot going on, we're by no means the only researchers in this district, you have to coordinate carefully, minimize burdens, plan ahead, and connect response rates, it requires careful calibration of things like incentives, timing so that you're not... so you're respecting blackout dates and so on but finding really the... I think anyone who calendar a good year in advance, getting you're IRB all set up and basically, all the due diligence one needs to do with any research project but they should be treated as such as a serious research project. And taking those kinds of steps could make I think an evaluation like this of a TIF project run successfully. And so there is no... I cannot emphasize enough the strong cooperation between us as an external evaluator and the district itself in just supporting the overall mission of getting an independent arms length evaluation of the impact of the program. And I think that has been going well. We're about to release our second annual impact report in a few weeks.

So that's the end of our presentation and we're... I can answer questions.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Alright. Well, we had questions coming in here but... and I think we'll... since we're on the evaluation topic right now, maybe we'll... we've got a couple that we could go right into. One of them is explicitly on the point you raised there initially, Steve, about the current round for the national evaluation. It's really nuts and bolts question, will that be then the only external evaluation or the external evaluator required for those grantees or will they also have the external evaluator requirement in addition to participating in the national evaluation?

Steven Glazerman – Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. – Economist

Well, I'm not sure if that's settled but I'm almost certain and you would want to verify, I could verify it if maybe... if there's some way to communicate to the group after the fact.

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Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Maybe you can do the followup after the fact.

Steven Glazerman – Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. – Economist

Okay, great. My understanding is that if a grantee applies and is funded through the evaluation component of the program then they won't be... that they're sort of off the hook for doing the evaluation. I'm not sure what the requirements are for doing an external evaluation for the main competition...

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Right. I believe it will be similar to the prior... that there actually will be a requirement for a strong external evaluation if not selected from the national evaluation group. But I think that's why we certainly get an official opinion on that from the Department of Ed and do that in the follow up.

Steven Glazerman – Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. – Economist

Great.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

The other question I got was really... you sort of addressed this in comparison the regular K-8 programs as being part of... under the No Child Left Behind grades for use in the Chicago TAP evaluation but with the schools of other types. Because we got another questions about what do I do in a rural setting. And so I think that's really... that calls for kind of a two part thing. We heard Carol talking about the semi-rural district where we have a few schools of a few types but I know in TIF, having worked on TIF one and two evaluation support, there really wasn't really an opportunity I think to stitch teach together a series of rural proposals potentially for a larger scale more ambitious evaluation. I guess it is a question I've heard and I think I will echo this here, is that sort of design doable? Do you think that's something that could be accomplished? I think in your national evaluation you certainly could.

Steven Glazerman – Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. – Economist

Well, this issue of rural schools or individual charter schools is something that we thought about a lot in structuring the competition for the next round of TIF grants and at least from the evaluator perspective, our hope was not to exclude those kinds of schools so that the idea that depending on what they're implementing, if they can sort of... you know, you can read the requirements in the evaluation component of the competition, the goal would not be necessarily to have to be implementing a TIF project in such a large scale that you would be sort of evaluable in the same way... on your own the same way that a Chicago or a Philadelphia would but that you would have a condition such that what you're doing is similar to somebody else, you know, some other part of the country and some other charter school. It has to be at least a few schools on the order of magnitude of what Carol was describing in the Weld Re-8 School District in Colorado but that the burden is not on the grantee to sort of develop that scale. All they have to do sort of follow the guidelines in such a way that they would be aggregatable with others and they'll let the national evaluator worry about

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the aggregating. And then when it comes to providing the grantee's specific feedback, you have to sort of be more creative in much the way that I think Carol and you, Chris, have been working together. You're in the other end of that tradeoff where you have... you don't have as much quantity of data but you might have a better... good quality and the ability to look, inspect almost every data point virtually to understand what's going on.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Great. Thanks a lot. And so sort of going back then in time, I think this is something that we have very different answers from Weldon and Houston. So one the questions we've got and again this echoes the question we answered... discussed again and again, what are these schools or these programs doing to address teachers in non-high-stakes subjects and grades both in terms of globally developed assessments or assessments that have been brought in that have been externally validated and used as part of performance compensation systems. I think that is really, again, both for the small and the large district or both I think we'd like to hear a response.

Carol Ruckel – Weld Re-8 School District, Colorado – Teacher Incentive Fund Coordinator

This is Carol in Weld Re-8, the small district. What we had done is we started this year and will continue next year what we calling the VIP program, Voluntary Incentive Paths and it's a program in addition to the school wide bonuses that is designed for individual teachers or teams of teachers and they can do a project for a semester or a year depending on the length of their class and it can be an action research project or it can be a student assessment prediction or something else that has to relate to the school improvement plan or the district improvement plan. And their project has to be approved by their principal and we leave that as a building level where things are known the best and they have to set some kind of goal if they are... if they have assessments available to them and they can use either a teacher creative assessment that the principal approves. Most of them are using either elements of our state tests, identifying specific elements on that or they're using the math test of NWEA which we give in the district or DRA2 or something like that. Or something else related to the school improvement plan but they set a target and if they meet the target, they will get an additional bonus. For example in our high school, one of the most unusual project is our band teacher who identified four really gifted musicians who are struggling to finish school and her goal was to use very specific techniques to get these kids not only to graduate but to apply and be accepted in higher education and if three out five identified kids, if she succeeded with that then she would get a bonus. So we are trying to really be creative and let our teachers be creative relative to the plans of their schools that are put into place to meet identified needs and if the teachers are doing something to support that and help their school meet that need then they could be rewarded for that.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Great. Thanks, Carol. Carla or Don?

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Carla Stevens – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Assistant Superintendent

Yes, this is Carla in Houston. I've got some really exciting here I want to... I think that's really neat work you all are doing and I also know in other programs such as in Austin, Texas is using having each teacher create like individual gross objectives and then they get measured based on that then they're able to get an award so that's able to get teachers who are at non-tested grades and subjects included. Our problem in Houston is that since we are a district wide program and we're dealing with over 23,000 employees, about 13,000 classroom teachers, until we can actually get some type of standardized assessment at these nonstandard subjects such as your PE, your music, any of the non-core courses. Until we can get something like that, we really don't have anything other than campus level awards and that is what we do is for all of our non-core teachers or at non-tested grades is we do give them an award based on the campus value-added scores in the specific subject areas, Reading, Math, Language, Science, and Social Studies, because we know that everybody does work together as a team to improve it. We would love to do something that we would be more individual specific but because of the volume of teachers that we have, if it's not something that we can automate and do outside (ph) as opposed to a very manual process such as what Carol describes or the individual gross objectives that they do in Austin at just a very small portion of their campuses, it's really hard for us to put that into place. I'm open and would love to figure some other ideas but our answer is to just use campus awards.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

Alright. Well, we're running down to the end of our time. I know one thing we would... we first would like to thank you for participating and there is going to be a short evaluation at the end that we really would like for you to answer for us... as much as anything to get feedback back to the Department of Ed about what you like, didn't like, and what else we might be able to provide for you.

I think we have another minute or two though. The other question I did get and I wanted to try to get in is the problem of linking. This is again often... it's an urban or large system problem. Could you just give us a nutshell in Houston sort of what is the core practice in this linking, sort of verify the link between students and teachers in such when any of these large systems breakdown, if they want to do an extended at the classroom level?

Carla Stevens – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Assistant Superintendent

Sure. What we do is in our student information system especially at the middle schools and high schools; we do have kids assigned to courses, teachers assigned to courses and we're able to link students and teachers that way.

At the elementary school is where it does break down. If you're in a self-contained study, we do have students linked to their homeroom and teachers linked to that homeroom and we can do it that way but the problem is that in most of our elementary

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schools, we have a lot of combinations of departmentalized and teachers teaching different kids for different subjects. So what we do is through one of our external partners is we load all of the information that we have as it exists from our student information system into an electronic portal. On that portal then the teachers are given the opportunity to go in the spring, at the end of spring, and see who we have as their roster of students reach their classes. If it is not correct, they have the opportunity to point and click a sort of system to delete out students, add students, change subjects, you know, do all sorts of things to be able to correctly identify which teachers taught which kids which subjects for which portion of the year. It also allows us to do co-teachers, inclusion teachers, lab teachers to be able to get a percentage of the instruction on if there is that team teaching type of thing. Once a teacher signs up on it then the principal has to go in and confirm that that information is correct and so then once both the teachers and the principal have signed up on that then we take that linkage information and that is when we send it to our external partner to add in with our test scores and to our value-added data. We then have another opportunity in the fall for principals to go back and to make sure that at least which teachers are which and which subjects. They can confirm it again but the linkage is always done in the spring and it is a one shot deal that has to be confirmed by everybody.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

That is wonderful. Thank you. Oh sorry, is there another one?

Don Hilber – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Manager

No, I was just going to amplify that the key critical elements are having that interactive portal system and also to have very good instructions and training especially to the principal levels since they are sort of the key player in all of this.

Christopher A. Thorn – Value-Added Research Center – Associate Scientist and Associate Director

That's really awesome. I really appreciate that. And I want like to thank everybody who called in and to thank our presenters for coordinating and giving us their valuable time to do this. I think the evaluation should be up in your screen now. Put in your responses and then hit the submit board then that will be it for today. Thank you very much.

Carla Stevens – Bureau of Performance Analysis, Department of Research and Accountability, Houston Independent School District, Texas – Assistant Superintendent

Thanks, Chris.

[music]

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